

CECILE

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

CECILE

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A NEW DIRECTION'S BOOK

CONTENTS

First Period	(<i>11th January—31st May 1793</i>)	page 23
Second Period	(<i>31st May 1793—18th August 1794</i>)	page 42
Third Period	(<i>3rd June 1795—4th August 1796</i>)	page 49
Fourth Period	(<i>7th August 1803—27th December 1804</i>)	page 55
Fifth Period	(<i>28th December 1804—11th October 1806</i>)	page 65
Sixth Period	(<i>12th October 1806—3rd December 1807</i>)	page 75
Seventh Period	(<i>6th December 1807—2nd February 1808</i>)	page 107

FIRST PERIOD



11th January—31st May 1793

IT WAS ON THE 11TH OF JANUARY 1793 THAT I MADE THE acquaintance of Cécile von Walterburg,² today my wife. For about two years she had been married to a Count von Barnhelm,³ a man much older than herself. The match had been made by Cécile's elder sister, the Baroness von Salzdorf.⁴ The latter, who for twenty years had been conducting a liaison with Count von Barnhelm, had hit on the plan of making him her brother-in-law without his ceasing to be her lover. Sacrificed to this odious intrigue, Cécile soon discovered the traffic between her elder sister and her husband, and without revealing her motives to her family—since she did not wish to grieve her father in his old age—she had the courage to break off all intimate relations with a man whom she considered unworthy of her. This resolution, after having exposed her to a deal of persecution within the household, created for her in public a reputation for oddity to which she resigned herself without seeking to justify herself.

At this time she lived alone in Count von Barnhelm's house, hardly ever seeing him, and appeared only very rarely at the Court of Bronsvic, where her husband held a post.

I myself was in the service of the Duke of Bronsvic,^s and married to a woman whom I had espoused out of weakness, whom since my marriage I had loved from kindness rather than from inclination, and whose intelligence and character were little to my mind. During a temporary absence of mine in Switzerland my wife had become attached to a Russian prince of eighteen years. This passion, which on my return I found in full force, irked me as an impropriety rather than wounded me to the heart. Being very young and very intolerant, but little able to remain constant to my own wishes, I had no authority over my wife. My affection for her had been derived only from a sort of wish to be agreeable, with the result that it ceased as soon as I perceived that it was no longer needed. I therefore made no attempt to win her back by forms of tenderness or sweetness. From time to time my quality of husband inspired me with random inclinations to exercise command over her ; but soon I myself became bored with such efforts. My wife's liaison with the prince—sometimes disturbed by violent but short scenes, which I made only against my own will—continued before my eyes ; and sometimes, forgetting my own situation, I would contemplate these two people to whom my presence was a vexation, and could not refrain from envying these two hearts intoxicated with love.

One day the three of us had spent the evening alone together in a fairly unbroken silence. But the glances of

the two lovers, their mutual understanding revealed in the slightest matters, their happiness at being together—although they could not say a word out of my hearing—plunged me into deep meditation. “How happy they are!” I said to myself as I went to my room, “and why should I be deprived of a like bliss? Why should I, at twenty-six years of age, have no more experience of love?” I spent the night occupied with these thoughts, and in the morning I reviewed in my imagination all the women I knew at Bronsvic—without, however, letting any of them take my fancy in such a way as to make me hope that I might fall in love with her.

Court duty summoned me to dine with an elderly duchess, the mother of the reigning Duke. After dinner she fell into conversation with me and suddenly asked me whether I knew Frau von Barnhelm. I had never especially observed her, by reason of the solitude in which she lived, and during my meditations of that morning the notion of her had not occurred to me. But when I heard her name, I suddenly said to myself that perhaps she would serve my purpose better than any of the women whose images I had been seeking to reconstruct.

On leaving the Duchess, I went to see her. Herr von Barnhelm was there, wearing a jacket and playing a violin. His wife was sitting on a sofa with an obvious air of boredom. I noticed that she had a pleasant face, a very white skin, a sweet tone of voice, fine hair and superb

arms and bosom. That same evening I wrote her a declaration. When I despatched it, I was by no means in love with her. But when I received her reply,^a which was seemly, witty, cool and polite, and ended with an absolute refusal to receive me in future, I felt, or thought I felt, the most violent passion. I wrote again, I begged pardon for my audacity, I confined myself to beseeching her to tolerate a sentiment that I no longer chose to describe as anything but a sincere and lively friendship. We negotiated for several days. At last I obtained permission to be received again. I multiplied my visits. I proposed that we should read together, and our life settled down in such a way that we spent almost an hour in each other's company daily.

A month went by thus, without my making any attempt to be happy except in Cécile's society. Every day she received me with greater affection, and became bound to me by habit. I do not know how long the matter would have continued on this footing, but one day Herr von Barnhelm, despite his connections with Cécile's sister and the barrier that had so long separated him from his wife, suddenly thought fit to grow jealous. I was compelled to break off my visits. Cécile was almost as sorry at this as I was. The despair I displayed caused her sometimes to evade the prohibition that Herr von Barnhelm did not seem to her very well entitled to impose.^b We saw each other at the promenade, at the theatre, at a few receptions—never in her house and never alone.

Despite this Herr von Barnhelm doubled his exigency and violence, even while continuing his public and scandalous liaison with Frau von Salzdorf. His behaviour resulted in disturbances, scenes, and especially, on Cécile's part, in deep distress. Her husband, who had displayed jealousy only for the sake of a vanity that could not prevail for long in so indolent and egoistic a character, was vexed to find his household thus agitated and melancholy. He was a self-centred man rather than a harsh one. The sight of a young woman often in tears pained and wearied him. He finally hit on the notion of proposing to Cécile a divorce, in accordance with German laws and customs, which would give her back her independence. Cécile, who was no longer his wife *de facto*, eagerly accepted this proposal, and the first steps were taken without either her or myself foreseeing that her freedom might provide her with a means of uniting her destiny with mine. After all, I was married, and neither the passion that my wife displayed for the little prince of whom I have spoken, nor my love for Cécile had led me to seek to break the bonds that I, for my part, found in no way irksome.

Suddenly, however, an event occurred in my household the result of which was to restore my freedom to me, too—a freedom of which I had no idea of taking advantage. Frau von Salzdorf was holding a big reception, to which all the Court was invited. Prince Narishkin⁷—this was the name of my wife's young lover—received

an invitation, and so did my wife. I was the only person excluded, because Frau von Salzdorf had supposed that it would be disagreeable for Herr von Barnhelm to meet me. She knew nothing of his plan for a divorce, which he had hidden from her for fear that she might oppose it, whilst Cécile, who bore her a grudge for having arranged her unhappy marriage, had taken good care not to confide in her.

On the eve of the day on which this reception was to be held, I was dining at the Court and found myself sitting beside an elderly and ugly lady-in-waiting. I expressed my surprise at my exclusion by Frau von Salzdorf. As I spoke of it I did not attach great importance to it. But when she learnt that my wife was invited without me, she began speaking to me, at first with circumspection, of my domestic situation. Her age seemed to give her the right to interfere in the affairs of a young man who was steering his life rather ill and seemed to be very displeased with it. In any case, I have never been able to impress others in such a way as to prevent them from telling me things to which I should not listen. Everybody always feels called upon to give me advice. I make myself cheap because I do not interest myself much. I listen peacefully to others because they do not interest me at all, and it is by dint of indifference that I acquire an appearance of docility and good nature which encourages the advice-givers. Moreover, the person with whom I was talking was, as I have said, ugly and

elderly. My wife, without being pretty, nevertheless had the advantage over her in age and figure. There is a secret enmity between all women, especially between those of different ages. The conversation became warmer, and after the ordinary preambles, in which hate is explained as friendship and calumny as friendly interest, we came to plain speaking. A thousand surprising details and wounding observations were brought to my notice, together with a forceful depiction of the disesteem that befalls a husband when he is tolerant and the ridicule that befalls him when he is deceived.

I returned home full of an artificial emotion, which I forced myself to sustain. I found my wife alone and started a conversation which soon became all the more bitter the less real feeling there was in it on one side and the other. My wife made to leave the room. I ordered her to sit down and listen to me. She obeyed. I was so little accustomed to authority that her obedience completely took me aback. Nevertheless I stimulated my anger afresh. I spoke of a husband's rights, of my will and my power. It was not all too clear to me just what I wanted. I have always had at the bottom of my heart a sort of kindness that prevents me from demanding anything that causes real pain to others. The effect of each of my words seemed to be to forbid my wife any further liaison with the man at whom I appeared to have taken umbrage, yet I hesitated to announce this prohibition since it seemed to me unjust, and perhaps

also because my attachment to Cécile appeared, in my own eyes, to deprive me of the right to demand a sacrifice which I was not at all disposed to requite. If my wife had had the wit to discern all that was passing through my soul, we would have calmed down through fatigue and matters would have remained as they had been. But she fancied herself threatened in her passion, and, supposing something that I had by no means yet uttered, she told me that she would sacrifice to her own reputation the affection with which I reproached her, but that she refused ever again to see the man who, without loving her, subjected her to such a sorrow. Certain wounding expressions that accompanied this declaration provoked my irritation, and I subscribed to a proposal that until that moment had not entered my mind. We agreed to admit nobody into our secret.

There was no question of a divorce. We promised that neither of us would ever again enter the other's apartment, that we would as far as possible separate our interests, that we would meet only in public, and that we would always act, in all circumstances that we could not foresee, as best we could in order not to do injury one to the other but also not to see one another. We signed this species of treaty. On the next day we made all the arrangements resulting from it. I took back a portion of furnishings necessary for a separate apartment, amongst others an old pianoforte which my father had given me and to which I attached great value.

We lived thus for several days. My wife did not feel herself very much bound by the promise she had given me that she would no longer receive Prince Narishkin, and I was so weary of all household storms that I did not think of protesting against this breach of her word. This species of rupture, although there was nothing open about it, was necessarily a subject of gossip for a small, idle and inquisitive Court. Cécile—although, as has been seen, she had been in no way involved in what had happened—had become my confidant, and was afraid of finding herself accused of being the cause of certain wrongs on my part towards my wife. At her request, I showed more reserve in my visits, and I laboured to put an end to any rumours that might have complicated her situation.

One evening I was at home, alone, and somewhat sorrowful in my solitude. I opened the piano that my wife had restored to me. My glance fell upon a letter. It was from the Prince to my wife, and it left no doubt concerning their mutual relations and the results that these relations might have—results concerning which the Prince was eager to reassure her. When I read all this, my dormant sense of honour awoke. There are things that one suspects and seeks to ignore, but of which one cannot tolerate the proof. I went to my wife's quarters and showed her this letter. "I am in a position to ruin you," I said, "but I do not wish to do so. Let us break off a union that can no longer exist. Ask for your divorce.

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Accuse me of all the misdeeds that do not soil a man's reputation. I shall bring no reproach against you, but I wish to be free, and not to give my name to a child who compels me for ever to despise his mother." My wife sought to enter into explanations. I refused to hear a word. I gave her until the next day to decide, and I went off retaining the letter. On the following day one of my wife's relatives came to confer with me on the measures to be taken. I lent myself to everything, I abandoned a part of my fortune. Divorce was applied for by common consent. I was accused of a large number of misdeeds. Much sympathy was expressed with my wife. I was the target of much abuse. I held my peace and took comfort.

Now that Cécile and I were on the point of regaining our freedom, it was natural enough that we should think of letting this freedom serve to make us happy in one another. But the experience of marriage that I had had inspired me with a very keen distaste for this bond. It is a custom in Germany for husbands to concern themselves with the future lot of the wives from whom they are separating; and German good nature renders everything simple in this country which elsewhere would be scandalous. Cécile, happy at seeing me often and having only the purest relations with me, would perhaps never have thought of marrying me. But Herr von Barnhelm put this project into her head. Since the application for divorce a sort of friendship had arisen between

Cécile and Herr von Barnhelm. Cécile, in a somewhat natural desire for revenge, had taken pains to enlighten him concerning the character and conduct of Frau von Salzdorf, who had not been conspicuously faithful to him ; and the result had been that, almost at the same moment as he was parting from his wife, he had also left his mistress. It was therefore he who, for Cécile's sake, felt it incumbent upon him to labour to bring us together, and it was against him that I had to defend myself in the first moments of surprise that this project caused me.

But I did not defend myself for long. Cécile's sweet nature, my liking for her, and a sort of sympathy that has always united us, and still unite us, so that I am never for two hours in her company without feeling the happier<sup>s</sup>—all these soon led me to long for that which, at the bottom of my heart, I had been rather disposed to fear. Nevertheless, as I was greatly concerned that nobody should suspect me of having broken my first bonds with the sole object of contracting others, I was resolved to leave Bronsvic. Cécile and I promised each other love and faithfulness.

I asked her to keep our plans secret until my divorce and hers had been decreed, and I set out for Bad Pyrmont,<sup>s</sup> whither I went to exercise my love of leisure and the uncertainties that were still tormenting my fickle imagination and indecisive nature. Gaming, solitude in the midst of a social throng, the restfulness and freedom of

watering-place life, all seemed to me, after my escape from a life of grief and disturbance, sheer objects of delight; and what though I regarded myself as engaged to Cécile, and though I was sensible that she deserved my affection, it was sometimes merely with anxiety<sup>10</sup> that I envisaged the moment when I would again find myself charged with the life and destiny of another. Nevertheless I continually wrote to Cécile with a tenderness that I truly felt, and her letters gave me keen pleasure when they reawoke my awareness of the feeling that I had inspired in her. But I did not too impatiently await the moment for changing the present situation.

Scarcely a month had gone by when Cécile wrote to me that she had to speak with me on matters of importance and gave me a rendezvous for an appointed day at Kassel. I took horse and set out, but in a mood that contained less eagerness than fear to cause her pain, and I remember that on the way I sometimes had a sudden sensation of being almost harassed by this interview. When I reached Kassel, Cécile was not there, and I waited for her a whole day. This delay surprised me and caused me to fear that some unforeseen mishap had upset our plans. I became re-attached to Cécile by the fear of losing her, and during the last three hours of my waiting all the disquiets of love seized upon me. At last I saw Cécile dismounting from her carriage, and, reassured by her presence, I recaptured something of my former feelings. I learnt from her that she was nearing

the moment of her complete freedom. My own was not far off. I therefore seemed to behold at a very short distance the moment at which I was about to contract new bonds. The idea cast a certain constraint upon me. Cécile did not observe this, since she herself was embarrassed by the secret that she had to disclose to me, and I myself paid no attention to Cécile's embarrassment because I was entirely occupied with my own.

Thus we spent three days, much in love, but speaking of one thing and another, and almost never of our future. Although Cécile's appearance was very seductive, it did not occur to me to profit by our intimate encounters in the midst of a town where we were unknown. I saw in Cécile a person who would probably be my wife, and as such I wished to respect her. Perhaps, too, I feared to offend her by ill-placed advances, and to chain myself all the more closely if by chance I had succeeded.

Cécile was to leave on the fourth day, and we were nearing the end of the third without my having learnt why each of us had travelled from twenty to thirty leagues in order to meet. Finally she told me that she was about to be free, but that her father, who had consented to her divorce only with the utmost repugnance and whose opinion of me was not favourable, had calmed his anger only on the express condition that she would not marry me for several years. So there was the obstacle, unexpected and insurmountable; for Cécile was not of age, and, even if she had been, would never

have taken it upon herself to disobey her father. This was all I needed to make me fall into a boundless despair. I spent the night in weeping at Cécile's feet, whilst she sought to console me of this grief, not knowing how sudden it was and how little in accordance with my previous mood.

I accompanied her as far as the property of her elder brother, where I met a family that welcomed me somewhat coldly, and her sister-in-law demanded of her that I should leave the house the very next day. These difficulties added to my irritation, and consequently to my love. I proposed to Cécile that she should elope with me. She refused. I sorrowfully took the road for Pymont ; and it was with all the anguish of the most grievously forsaken lover that I again beheld the same leagues that I had traversed, five days earlier, almost irked by the prospect of the interview Cécile had appointed. My pain was so rending that I could scarcely remain on my horse and sometimes lay down on the ground, emitting shrieks and shedding tears.

On my return to Pymont I received letters from Switzerland informing me of a bankruptcy in which almost my entire fortune was jeopardised and which demanded my immediate presence. I returned to Cécile; I could see her<sup>11</sup> only for an instant and in secret. She was watched by her sister-in-law and feared to irritate her father. We shared our woes together. We were prodigal with a thousand protestations of love, and I threw myself

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into a post-chaise to go and save my fortune, if I could, and promising myself especially that, whatever happened, I would speedily return and take up residence in some spot near to where Cécile was staying, even if I were forbidden to see her often.

SECOND PERIOD



*31st May 1793—18th August
1794*

I ARRIVED AT LAUSANNE ON THE 31ST OF MAY 1793. I found that the bankruptcy¹² that had scared me had no very alarming consequences for my fortune. In fact, it cost me about 6,000 francs. As soon as the formalities necessary to my interests had been completed, I left Lausanne to visit an old friend, Mme de Chenevière,¹³ a woman of great intelligence and the author of several rather distinguished works—an odd character, to boot, and already elderly,¹⁴ but for whom I had entertained at Paris a sentiment almost similar to love.

This woman, after a somewhat turbulent life and a love-match of which her family had disapproved, was living almost in solitude, in a village of the region of Neuchâtel, with a husband who displayed great regard for her but was too cold and indolent in his habits to satisfy either her imagination or her heart. She had more than once conceived the project of having me to live with her, despite the disproportion of our ages. She had strongly opposed my first marriage; and, although she had made it her duty to advise me against divorce when I wrote to her on the subject, it was with extreme pleasure that she now beheld me arrive a free man, or almost so, since the courts were on the point of issuing

the decree ; and it was with surprise and chagrin that she learnt of my new love.

On the journey the passion for independence had regained its hold upon me, and Mme de Chenevière had no great difficulty in fortifying my attitude in this respect. The attitude taken by Cécile's father had postponed our union for an indefinite period. I therefore found it quite easy to accustom myself to the idea that what was remote and uncertain might very well not happen. Yet I kept on writing to my kind Cécile, whom in the midst of all my indecisions I tenderly loved, and as long as Cécile regularly answered me I did not once permit a break to occur in this correspondence in which I still found charm. But suddenly Cécile stopped writing to me: Mme de Chenevière's company had become daily more agreeable to me. Her original, bold and widely ranging intelligence entirely captivated me, at a time when I found intelligence more necessary than I find it nowadays. The image of Cécile gradually became effaced from my thoughts, and when the necessity of fulfilling certain formalities regarding my divorce called me back to Bronsvic, I scarcely thought any longer of our old projects, I regarded them as abandoned by both Cécile and myself, and I was left with no more than a vague, although rather sweet, memory of her.

I returned to Bronsvic on the 28th of April 1794. My wife's family had been working hard against me during my absence. I found myself blighted by a sort of

social proscription and admitted to Court only because I could not be excluded by reason of my rank and the post I held. I received so cold a welcome that after the first day I swore never to present myself there again. I kept my word. But, in the isolation in which this resolve plunged me, I sought distractions. There was at Bronsvic a woman of forty, the widow of a man of letters who had been my close friend and had died during my journey in Switzerland. The sense of attachment to her husband that I had retained bound us in very close friendship. From this woman I obtained information concerning Cécile. She depicted her to me as very much aloof from me, living always in strict retirement, as was her custom, but having shown no sign either of sorrow at our separation or of impatience to see me again. What I was told concerning her was confirmed by her own silence.

Nevertheless I wished to pay her a visit, and as I approached her dwelling I felt considerable emotion. She did not receive me. I returned to Mme Marcillon,¹⁵ my new friend. I felt a little offended with Cécile whom I thought I had seen at her window. The conversation naturally turned on her, and Mme Marcillon gave me so lively a description of the misery that would be brought upon my life by a liaison which would make me again dependent upon a woman ; she so exalted my imagination concerning the bliss of complete liberty, that I suddenly formed the resolve not in any way to renew my association with Cécile, and to spare no pains to avoid meeting

her. Next day Cécile wrote to me expressing her regret at not having been able to receive me on the previous day, and proposing a meeting on that very day. I replied with a civil, but cool note that ended in a refusal. She insisted. I continued to refuse. She urgently demanded that I should see her for a quarter of an hour in order to hear her justification. I persisted in the attitude I had adopted, with an obstinacy that I still find inexplicable ; and I finally sent word to her that the rumours which my feelings of attachment for her had engendered concerning my divorce, the value I set upon destroying these rumours, and, above all, her silence of several months, had caused me to resolve to make a final breach. I thought I was being very strong-minded in resisting Cécile ; and the fact was that I was merely yielding to the influence of another woman who, without any particular object, but simply because of the secret mutual hatred between women, was taking pleasure in seeing me distress, and perhaps humiliate, a person whom she did not know.

Cécile left for Hamburg two days later. I was not long in receiving a long letter from her. She explained the silence that had wounded my feelings ; but, herself offended by my strange refusals to see her even on a single occasion, she renounced all further relationship or correspondence. A sort of sadness that was the prevailing tone of her letter inspired me with regret at having rejected her affection : I replied tenderly and attributed my singular conduct to too keen a sensibility

and to the importance I had attached to what I had thought to be forgetfulness. I proposed to come to Hamburg, and I begged as a favour her permission for me to do so. This permission Cécile simply, frankly and joyfully granted.

But a task that I had undertaken, certain affairs, an access of indolence prevented me from at once profiting by it ; and soon, reassured of my possession of Cécile's heart, I began—I blush to confess it—to attach less value to what I no longer feared to lose. Again in my letters I began to speak of the happiness of independence—at the same time adding a thousand protestations of love. Cécile, understanding nothing of my strange vacillations, entered into no dispute in her replies, but expressed the desire for a meeting that would help us to clear up misunderstandings. I postponed everything from one day to the next. Time slid by. A decree of the Convention obliging holders of annuities to produce their titles legalised by a neutral ambassador persuaded me that I ought to return to Switzerland to do something that I could have done at Hamburg. I sent word to Cécile that I would not see her until my return, which I represented as being not far distant, and I again set out for Switzerland, where I arrived on the 18th of August 1794. Cécile, although slightly surprised at this overthrow of all our projects, nevertheless sought to find excuses for me in her heart. She believed in the importance of my affairs.

Her letters, which were always affectionate and gentle, would doubtless have brought me back to her, and I was already taking measures, although as yet negligently, to approach the matter, when of a sudden, by a chance that was to have a long-lasting influence on my life, I met Mme de Malbée,¹⁶ the person most celebrated in our century for her writings and conversation. I had never in the world seen her like, and I fell passionately in love. For the first time Cécile was completely effaced from my memory. I no longer answered her. Finally she stopped writing to me ; and here begins a vast gap in our story, interrupted only from time to time by circumstances that were apparently insignificant but seemed to warn us, from one end of Europe to the other, that we had been destined to be united.

THIRD PERIOD



3rd June 1795—4th August 1796

ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT MY PURPOSE TO DEAL HERE WITH what passed during fifteen years between Mme de Malbée and myself, I yet cannot forego speaking in detail of a woman whose character and passions, charm and faults, imperfections and qualities, were of so great importance for Cécile's destiny and mine.

When I met Mme de Malbée, she was in her twenty-seventh year. A figure rather short than tall, and too robust to be slender ; irregular and exaggerated features ; an unattractive complexion ; the loveliest eyes in the world ; very fine arms ; hands slightly too big, but of a dazzling whiteness ; a superb bosom ; over-rapid movements and over-masculine postures ; a very sweet tone of voice, which in emotion broke in a singularly touching manner : all these formed a whole which made an unfavourable impression at the first glance, but acquired an irresistible seductiveness when Mme de Malbée spoke and became animated.

Her wit, the most widely ranging ever possessed by any woman, and perhaps by any man, was characterised, in all serious matters, by more strength than grace, and in all matters involving sensibility by a tinge of solemnity and affectation. But her gaiety contained a certain indefinable charm, a sort of childishness : and good nature that

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captivated the heart by momentarily establishing between herself and her listeners a complete intimacy, and that set in abeyance all reserve and distrust, all those secret restrictions, invisible barriers which nature has set between man and man, and which not even friendship completely causes to disappear.

Mme de Malbée had been living for nearly a year in Switzerland, to which the Revolution had obliged her to withdraw. Brought up in the most brilliant society of France, she had acquired some portion of the elegant forms of this society. Above all, she had that habit of bestowing praise which characterises French people of the first rank. Her wit dazzled me, her gaiety enchanted me, her praises turned my head. By the end of an hour she had gained over me perhaps the most absolute empire that any woman has ever exercised. I took up quarters at first near her and subsequently in her house. I spent the whole winter in discoursing to her of my love.

In the spring of 1795 I followed her to France. With all my natural impetuosity, and with a wilfulness even younger than my age, I abandoned myself to revolutionary opinions. Ambition seized hold of me, and now I could see only two desirable things in the world—to be citizen of a republic and to be the head of a party. Mme de Malbée's ascendancy over me was not, however, diminished by this ambition, although the two things were sometimes in conflict. It was not that Mme de Malbée did not share my opinions or associate herself

with my hopes ; but her imprudence, her need to create an effect, her celebrity and her numerous and contradictory connections, aroused all kinds of mistrust against her. The chiefs of Republican France, violent and coarse-grained men, could not believe that one adopted their principles if one did not adopt their hatreds in all their ferocity. By nature quick to take offence, and by situation prone to suspicion, they regarded as their allies only those who made themselves their accomplices. Mme de Malbée, despite her efforts to captivate them, and indeed because of these efforts, seemed to them suspect ; and their suspicions ricocheted back upon me. This grieved me greatly : I would have given half of my fortune and ten years of my life to offer some brilliant proof of my devotion to a cause of which I was perhaps the only partisan in good faith. Nevertheless Mme de Malbée retained her power over me. I returned with her to Switzerland, although this journey interrupted the work to which I had set myself in order to play a rôle in the affairs of France.

It was on my return, after more than a year's interval, during which I had neither uttered nor heard Cécile's name, that I found a letter from her—but a very old one, since I did not arrive in Switzerland until the 25th of December 1795, and her letter was dated the 3rd of June. Cécile had written it to me from Constance, where she had spent some days whilst making a tour of Switzerland. She supposed me to be at Lausanne, and invited me to

come and see her. The mental picture of Cécile, thus suddenly presenting itself to me when I so little expected it, caused me extreme emotion. I clearly saw that she would by now have departed. Nevertheless I hastened to answer her, and my answer was most loving. My letter never reached her ; it was not forwarded. The transitory perturbation I had felt at the sight of her handwriting calmed down of itself, and I again lost all trace of Cécile, whom I might have found again in Germany, but did not even attempt to discover.

## FOURTH PERIOD



*7th August 1803—27th December*  
*1804*





SEVERAL YEARS ENSUED WITHOUT ANY CIRCUMstances reminding me of Cécile, and the political storms and disturbances of my life in the midst of the Revolution, with which I had insisted on meddling and in which I had obtained some literary successes, at the price of a great number of enemies, had as if effaced her from my memory, when chance carried as far as my ears the news of her marriage with a Comte de Saint-Elme,<sup>18</sup> a French emigré whom she had married in Germany. I was astonished at the sort of disappointment provoked in me by an event that should have been highly indifferent to me. I was grieved and bothered for several days. But precisely at this time I was a member of the Tribune which for several months endeavoured to set limits to the despotic power which had been permitted to establish itself amidst the convulsions of a shamefully governed Republic ; and the threats hurled at those Tribunes who were not in favour of the Dictatorship then in preparation, were too real not to distract me from a matter that was not very keenly alive in my heart. The struggle we sustained against an immense power was so unequal that it was bound to end to our disadvantage. With nineteen of my colleagues I was excluded from the

assembly which, after having consented to its mutilation, soon consented to its destruction, and I returned into private life.

My bonds with Mme de Malbée had been reimposed, without making us happy. I entertained the notion of breaking them, and I was writing to her accordingly from the depths of a small country retreat where I was spending the summer of 1803, when suddenly, on the 7th of August, I received a letter from Cécile. My heart began to beat rather violently when I recognised a handwriting that I had not seen for so long. Cécile wrote to me from Paris, where she had been for three months. She had heard a report that, having been deprived of my offices and having quarrelled with Mme de Malbée, I was living in solitude and poverty in some obscure retreat. She urged me to accept a portion of her fortune, and, not being able to conceal her marriage from me, she spoke of it with a sort of timidity that cast over her whole letter a rather touching tinge of melancholy. I was flattered by her memory of me, touched by her offer, but I felt that I could not easily brook seeing her again in the power of another.

I left for Paris next day. I hastened to Cécile's place of lodging, where I found that on the day before she had set out for Geneva. I wrote to her. I gave lively expression to my gratitude ; but an involuntary coquetry caused me to exaggerate my grief at the new bonds that she had taken upon herself. I excused myself for not accepting her

offer, of which I had no need ; and, begging her to give me at least the sorrowful pleasure of hearing her whole story, I told her that I would endeavour to come and see her as soon as I knew where she would be settled.

Cécile did not keep me waiting for the narrative I had asked for. Having been separated from me for ten years, and having had no news of me for nine, she had lived almost the whole time with her father. She had written to me on several occasions without ever being able to learn whether her letters had reached me. Her father had opposed our union throughout his life, and had taken my silence as a warrant to enjoin her to renounce a man who took no more interest in her. He had given asylum in his castle to an entire family of emigrés, consisting of an old Comte de Saint-Elme, his three sons and a daughter. The Comte de Saint-Elme and Herr von Walterburg had died almost simultaneously, and Cécile had found herself isolated in a house filled with funereal associations. Wenceslas de Saint-Elme, the Comte's eldest son, had cared for her in her grief and offered her distraction in her solitude. He had fallen passionately in love with her, and she had for long resisted his pleas that she should marry him.

She had again written to me and had entrusted her letter to a Frenchwoman who, probably scared of finding me, on her arrival in France, a member of the Republican Party, and fearing that she would compromise herself if she made herself known to me, had not dared to

discharge her commission but, wishing to disguise her negligence, had sent word to Cécile that she had despatched the letter to me. This woman had added that I was intimately and publicly connected with Mme de Malbée. Cécile had written to me a second time, informing me that her isolation, the obligations under which she lay to M. de Saint-Elme, the gratitude which she could not refuse to the affection he had shown her and the care he had taken of her in the cruellest moments of her life, and finally the idea of devoting her fortune to extracting a worthy man and worthy family from a disastrous situation of exile and poverty—that all these things would decide her in favour of marriage, although she felt no love ; but that she did not regard her decision as a free one, that she felt she would be still happier to devote herself to him whom she had loved so long ; that she had undertaken no engagement, and that my reply would decide her destiny. This letter had the same fate as the previous one. Wounded, abandoned to herself, pursued by the passion of a suitor whose misfortunes made him an object of interest and pity, Cécile had married M. de Saint-Elme on the 14th of June 1798.

After these details, Cécile launched forth into eulogies of her husband's character. But it was clear that she was praising him from a sense of duty : the nature of her praises made it plain enough that he was a man without wit or grace, and the trouble she took to assure me that,

once married, she had never repented of the union, at once convinced me that in fact she had not been slow to repent of it. The letter gave other glimpses of vexation and unhappiness. She besought me to write to her at the poste restante. I guessed that M. de Saint-Elme was not only tedious but also tyrannical and jealous.

Whilst I was thus renewing my association with Cécile, my relations with Mme de Malbée had become stormier than ever ; and since I could not foresee that Cécile would one day be my means of breaking those relations, the disturbances of my daily life, far from settling my thoughts upon her, served only to distract me from her. Nevertheless I did not neglect to think of her, and each of her letters, depicting her to me, despite her intention, as suffering and oppressed, interested me more and more ; but with so little result that, when Mme de Malbée had announced her intention of coming to France, whence she was exiled, I resolved to wait for her there and gave up the plan of journeying to Geneva, and, consequently, any possibility of again seeing Cécile. I found sweetness in the thought of her, I thought of her with tenderness, and when Mme de Malbée was overwhelming me with reproaches, I liked to tell myself that there was at least one being in the world who judged me with less acerbity.

Mme de Malbée finally arrived. Our first meetings were not especially friendly, and from then onwards a rupture between us would have been inevitable, but that, twelve days after she had settled down in a country place<sup>19</sup>

adjacent to mine, Mme de Malbée was afflicted with a second banishment. It was not in accordance with my character or my heart to abandon a woman who had been proscribed. I made my peace with her, and we set out for Germany. I spent about three months in this country. Mme de Malbée made up her mind to visit Berlin. Having left France without a regular passport, and being on bad terms with the Consular Government, I did not wish to expose myself to the consequences of its malevolence by appearing at a court where there was a French ambassador. I therefore parted with Mme de Malbée at Leipzig. She extracted a promise from me that I would never marry any other woman, and I took the road for Paris.

Whilst I was at various cities in Germany, I had several times written to Cécile, and had always received from her evidence of trust and friendship. I promised myself keen pleasure in seeing her again, and I proposed to make a halt at Geneva, only to learn if she were still there. But destiny, which had so often made sport of my hopes, was preparing a cruel surprise for me.

I was at half a league's distance from Geneva when I learnt that Mme de Malbée's father had recently died. She loved him with an unbounded passion, and perhaps he was the only being on earth whom she has ever completely loved. I pictured her despair, in the midst of strangers, without a single soul who could imagine or share her grief. I felt obliged to fly to her help, and after a journey of nine days and nine nights I was at her side. I

took her back to Switzerland, and there I spent the rest of the year.

Cécile, informed of the reason for the change in my plans, and, moreover, not regarding herself as having any claim upon me, understood and approved the devotion of my friendship. Mme de Malbée, who is sincere in her grief but found her own grief a burden, proposed to seek distractions in Italy. I pretended to have affairs at Paris. Cécile had returned there, and I at last arrived there on the 27th of December 1804.





## FIFTH PERIOD



*28th December 1804—11th October  
1806*



I SAW CECILE AGAIN ON THE 28TH OF DECEMBER 1804, eleven years, seven months and nine days after having left her. She received me with the utmost friendship. I was less moved than I expected. I thought her still pretty, however, and distinguished especially by a sort of sweetness and a harmony that pleased me in all her movements. I made the acquaintance of her husband, who seemed to me just what his wife's letters had caused me to expect—a Frenchman whom not even the fickleness of his nature and the frivolity of his tastes could prevent from being tedious. Cécile gave herself up to the pleasure of seeing me with all the unrestrainedness of her frank and loving nature. If I had listened to her, I would not have stirred from her side.

I was not long in perceiving that, on the one hand, she was again acquiring a fairly keen liking for me and that, on the other hand, her husband was becoming jealous. I reminded Cécile of the days of her first youth, days that always take on the more charm the further they recede. I reminded her of her first love. M. de Saint-Elme knew that his wife had loved me, and that it depended solely on me whether or not their marriage was to be prevented; and some presentiment, I know not what, which I regarded at

the time as most chimerical, inspired him with a dim uneasiness concerning intentions which I did not entertain.

As often happens in life, the precautions he took to hinder these presentiments from becoming reality were precisely what succeeded in making them do so. At first he did not try to prevent his wife from receiving me. But his sour, heavy pleasantries, a continual ill-humour and scenes that naturally induced his wife to pay more attention to me than to him; his capricious behaviour, a mixture of weakness and harshness, of severity and negligence; sometimes his actual incivilities towards me, which gave me in Cécile's eye the advantage of moderation and the merit of enduring them for her sake: all these things could not help but establish an intimacy between Cécile and myself which I could not have avoided had I wished to, and indeed such was often my sincere intention.

I kept on telling myself that I had once already upset Cécile's whole life. I reproached myself for her woes resulting from a marriage of which I had been the involuntary cause. She would have been much less wretched with her first husband, in the bosom of her family and fatherland, than she now was, married to a foreigner, carried off to a country she detested, and finding neither a point of support nor friendship nor natural bonds in the midst of a society that conflicted with her opinions, habits and tastes. The idea of a second divorce never entered my head. The only course I could

see open to her—sad, but without alternative—was that of resigning herself to the destiny she had brought upon herself; and I had promised myself that, on my part at least, nothing would be attempted that might again disturb this destiny. I therefore deliberately drew myself apart; I paid visits to the country; I sometimes spent whole weeks without seeing her. But when I did so she wrote me such sad letters that I allowed myself to be dragged back, and, once in her presence, I resumed a tone of tenderness, a language of love such as I have never been able to prevent myself from using with women—with the result that I would undo in a single visit all the good that might have been done by my absence.

There occurred what I had foreseen. I saw Cécile completely renew her affection for me; and if my actions had the appearance of indifference, my words and letters were filled with expressions of love. M. de Saint-Elme's jealousy finally rose to an extremity. Cécile spoke to me of it with consternation. I gave her the best advice in the world, and although I, too, was touched by the inclination towards me which she could no longer disguise, I declared to her more than once that the only proper course for us was to cease to see each other. But I was her only friend at Paris, the only man to whom she could confide her troubles; and the idea of depriving herself of this last, feeble consolation seemed terrifying to her, and I would have found it too harsh to snatch

this consolation from her by my own deliberate action. I therefore surrendered to events, telling myself that, after all, I owed nothing to M. de Saint-Elme, and that I must comfort Cécile to the best of my powers and as long as I still had the possibility of so doing—which would certainly soon be taken away from me, for I expected him from one day to the next to exercise his rights in order to remove his wife or to forbid her my visits.

This actually happened. One evening Cécile received me entirely collapsed in grief, and, after making a vain attempt to control herself, and informing me that she would write to me, she burst into tears and confessed that she had received me for the last time. I was touched by her grief, but without being shaken in my resolve not to compromise her. I urged on her the necessity of obeying, I promised her happier times in store, and I left her—herself in tears and myself very much moved. She told me in letters of scenes with M. de Saint-Elme, whom her obedience had not at all appeased. My replies—which were affectionate but reasonable—were aimed only at expressing a friendship that nothing could end and to console her by proposing that she should seek for a means of returning to her family and eluding the persecutions of an unjust husband.

One day Cécile wrote to me that M. de Saint-Elme had restored to her the control of her own fate, that she wished to entrust it to me, and that she desired an interview with me. I perceived that Cécile was about to offer

to separate from her husband. I began by consenting to the interview she asked for, and over the rest I pondered. On the one hand, nothing seemed to me more hazardous than a marriage based on two divorces, and I knew Cécile, and German ideas generally, well enough to know that when saying that she "would leave me free to decide on her destiny", she meant nothing less than marriage. I was deeply frightened of French public opinion, which forgives all the vices but is inexorable concerning the conventions and willingly accepts hypocrisy as a form of civility rendered to it. Being myself still exposed to the government's enmity, whilst being almost proscribed in society for republican opinions, I did not feel strong enough to protect a woman against all the accepted prejudices and against the disfavour that divorce had inherited from the abuse made of it during a disastrous and insensate revolution. On the other hand, my heart blossomed out at the thought of at last making Cécile happy and of atoning for my former wrongs and the folly that these wrongs alone had caused her to commit.

This generous motive became mingled with less pure and more egoistic considerations. Mme de Malbée, who had spent the winter in Italy, had that moment returned, and, in accordance with her custom, was imperiously demanding my presence, at an appointed date. Having perceived that I had no clear explanation to offer on this subject, she had resumed in her letters that tone of violence and menace which had so often caused me to

rebel against her empire and my weakness. In Cécile's projects I could glimpse so many difficulties—and, in any event, so much time was bound to elapse before they could be accomplished—that a decision taken in advance scarcely seemed to me a decision at all. Finally, I assured myself that Cécile could do nothing else but gain by breaking her bonds with an odd, mediocre and jealous husband, and that even if I did not marry her, she would always be in better case for having become free again. Moreover, I was not morally sure, after all, that what she had in mind for me was truly marriage, and my indecision took refuge in the sort of uncertainty that I might still be permitted to harbour in this respect.

I therefore waited, without having yet come to any resolve. She came, and asked me whether, in the event of her succeeding, by various sacrifices of fortune, in freeing herself from the yoke she had imposed upon herself, I would then marry her. To adjourn my reply was to renounce her for ever. To accept was to engage myself to almost nothing, so many were the chances of her project's failing. Moreover, the sweetness of her nature, the long-standing love that she had always retained for me, the pain that hesitation on my part would have caused her, all these considerations invincibly drove me to decide for the affirmative. She then told me that, after daily storms and discussions, M. de Saint-Elme had said to her that, since she regarded it as such unhappiness no longer to see me, he preferred to separate



from her rather than see her taken up with another. Their marriage, which had been celebrated in Germany, had never been ratified in France. It was contrary to the Catholic religion, which bans divorce, and no priest would consent to bless it. M. de Saint-Elme had therefore offered to have it declared null, or to sue for its annulment in the German courts.

Our interviews multiplied. Although Cécile came to my house alone, I never tried to obtain anything from her. I was unwilling either to leave her afflicted with remorse, if she remained the wife of another, or to prepare harassing memories for her if she became mine. M. de Saint-Elme gave her all the papers that he deemed necessary. She fixed the day of her departure. I saw her on the eve of it. Her proofs of affection had made me entirely her captive. We were agreed concerning our course of action, but I still regarded these plans as fanciful. Cécile refused to do anything without the consent of her family, and we were entirely ignorant whether her relatives would be willing to lend themselves to her proposals.

She set off. She wrote to me from stations along the road, and from Germany, sometimes varying both her resolves and her style. The consent given by M. de Saint-Elme was not valid; and his letters contained such expressions of regret at having given this consent that Cécile was sometimes thoroughly shaken. I continually made it my duty to urge her carefully to consult her own

heart. I disguised from her none of the inconveniences of the breach of her marriage. I was staying with Mme de Malbée, who had regained all her ascendancy over me. But whenever we had bitter discussions, which was not seldom, Mme de Malbée's impetuosity drove me back towards the notion of marrying Cécile, and on such occasions I would write to her to this effect.

In the spring of 1806 I accompanied Mme de Malbée, much against my will, on a long and gloomy expedition which she undertook in order to return to Paris. Some letters from Cécile were lost. After having written to her and received no reply, I supposed that she had forgotten me. I regretted the loss of her, but I had imposed upon myself the law of not pressing her on a matter that could be a great source of repentance and pain, if she did not act of her own volition. Six months passed without our hearing mention of one another, and on this occasion I believed that Cécile, who had remained in Germany, was for ever separated from me.

## SIXTH PERIOD



*12th October 1806—3rd December*  
*1807*



I WAS AT ROUEN, EVER FOLLOWING MME DE MALBEE ON her pilgrimage, leaving nothing undone to serve her, but grief-stricken at thus spending my life on the high roads and spoiling acts of devotion with bitter words and ungenerous reproaches. Suddenly, on the 12th of October 1806, I received a letter from Cécile, who was at Paris. She informed me that she had returned to the capital, not knowing what to think of my silence ; that she had written to me several times without receiving a word in answer ; and that she wished to see me in order finally to learn if she was to separate two destinies that she had never ceased to join together in her thoughts.

This unexpected invitation seemed to me a stroke of fortune to deliver me from bonds that had become intolerable. I replied enthusiastically and promised to be at Paris within a week. I arrived there, in fact, on the 20th of October. I saw Cécile on the morning of the 21st. M. de Saint-Elme was in a remote province and knew nothing of Cécile's return, so that she was perfectly free. She wished me to stay to dinner. Impressed by the circumstance, seeing that I would have to take a decision, and feeling my uncertainty reawakened, I made a pretext

of some piece of business and promised to return in the evening.

I went to dine with one of my friends, and the perturbation into which I had been plunged by the sight of Cécile and the future that unexpectedly reopened before me, continued and increased during the meal. The conversation turned upon women, and was as such conversations commonly are amongst men. A sort of remorse for my fatuity seized upon me. I reproached myself for having been loved by Cécile for thirteen years without having demanded and obtained irrefutable proofs of her love ; and I returned to her lodging resolved to risk all to win all, for the rest leaving my lot to chance.

She was awaiting me impatiently and received me with joy ; her door was locked ; the hour was still early ; I had the whole night before me. Cécile was not at all upon her guard. My conduct throughout so long a time had inspired her with a sweet habit of trust. A hundred times in our long meetings, and in the most remote spots, she had been in my arms without having to defend herself against any advance that might alarm her. I first allowed her to tell of all that she had done or attempted in Germany in order to become free. We considered what remained to do ; and, soon in agreement concerning our steps for the present, we abandoned ourselves to our hopes for the future. The image of our future happiness awoke Cécile's tenderness. I saw her intoxicate herself with her own words ; and my words, together with my

caresses, completed the assault upon her senses. Finally she was mine, as much from surprise as from rapture, without having thought to resist, because she was not suspecting the attack.

In thus triumphing over her, I experienced a most singular feeling, a repentance and shame that pursued me in the midst of the pleasure itself. I was not very scrupulous in relations with women, and a success of this sort had never seemed to me anything that one should forbid oneself or feel ashamed of. But Cécile had such loyalty, such good faith, she had so little notion that I might abuse her lack of caution with me, that my feelings almost resembled what I would have felt had I robbed a blind man who had asked me to guide him or had I killed a child who had entrusted himself to me.

For Cécile's part, once she had recovered from her astonishment, she was plunged in a deep sorrow. She offered me no reproach, but remained silent and motionless, whilst the tears flowed from her eyes. When I spoke to her, and thus obliged her to answer, I saw that all her ideas were altered. She no longer believed that she had any right over me. She spoke with humility, discouragement, self-abnegation, without my succeeding for a long time in inducing her to recapture any notion of the future. Her condition touched me greatly—far more than if, as so many other women would have done, she had taken the new bonds established between us as an occasion to consider me the more obliged towards

her. I felt aware of duties precisely because she did not seem to believe that I had any. I devoted the whole night to convincing her that this moment had joined us together for life; that she had yielded only to the man who before God and as a consequence of so many previous projects was now her husband; that, since M. de Saint-Elme had given his consent to the divorce, it was of little importance that this consent should have lacked a few formalities which could easily be fulfilled, and the absence of which, therefore, altered nothing in the intention of the parties or in the moral validity of the consent.

Cécile listened to me and believed me. "If you deceive me," she said, taking my hand, "you will kill me. But I am resolved to believe that you will not deceive me. I therefore regard you for ever as my husband, as my lord. From now on it is for you to dictate my least movements. All that you command me, I shall do. You alone are in charge of my life, and I have no other duties but faithfulness and submission." All this she later carried out with a scrupulous exactitude that words cannot depict; and neither outward events nor the griefs or faults of my own character, nor the perpetual changes in my resolves nor my eternal vacillations, nor Mme de Malbée's ascendancy over me, of which Cécile has often been the victim, none of these things have caused her once to deviate from the path of obedience she had set for herself. She has followed me when I wished



it ; she has left me when I told her to do so. She has lived alone when I demanded that she should do so in order that I might be more freely with her rival. She has never complained. I have seen her tears, without ever hearing her reproaches. She has always conformed to my least desires ; and after a long period of sacrifice she has redoubled her tenderness, patience and resignation.

After spending several days with Cécile, during which our new relations, and the manner in which she set all her destiny in my hands, attached me to her more and more, I returned to Rouen, to the company of Mme de Malbée. My heart was so full of Cécile that everybody noticed my excitement. Mme de Malbée wore herself out in efforts to discover its cause ; and often I was tempted to reveal it to her in the hope that she would regard it as a barrier between us and would consent to a breach which, whilst it had always been desirable in view of our mutual attitude, had become an absolute necessity since my undertakings to Cécile.

One day I was writing to this latter when Mme de Malbée came into my room. She had the habit of reading my letters ; but since I had never refused to let her do so, she attached no great importance to it—with the result that I had easy methods of not showing her those that I wished to hide from her, and had therefore never thought of disputing with her a right that we held in common, without our either of us having for a long time made use of it. On this occasion, various things—I know not

what disturbance she perceived in my looks ; my precipitation in hiding what I was writing ; the strangeness of my manners ever since my return ; and the obscurity of certain remarks that I had let slip—excited her curiosity. She demanded, in a rather imperious manner, that I should show her my letter. I refused, and, to put an end to the dispute, burnt the letter in her presence. Her irritation increased, and during the quarrel that followed the idea occurred to me that by telling her everything I would free myself at once from a dissimulation that I found painful and a yoke that I found burdensome. This course of action, which I adopted as a proof of strength, was perhaps only a result of the weakness of which I had acquired the habit, and which made it practically impossible for me to oppose Mme de Malbée with any prolonged resistance. She therefore learned from me both of my relations with Cécile and of the promises by which I was bound. A storm arose that lasted without interruption all the day and all the night.

Fatigued to the end of my tether and fearing that Mme de Malbée might in her anger proceed to the extremities with which she threatened me, by the end of the dispute I was striving to reduce to vagueness all that I had said at the beginning. Mme de Malbée, no less exhausted than I, seized upon the first equivocal utterance to believe that I was withdrawing my previous statements; and although, with frequent accesses of

uneasiness, she sometimes questioned me bitterly, she in no way followed through her investigations, which I evaded, not without too often departing from the line of loyalty and frankness.

During this time Cécile had fallen sick of the emotion that my departure had caused her. It will appear strange (yet it is true) that Mme de Malbée's ascendancy over me was such that, despite the keenest love I had ever felt in my life, and despite the solicitations of Cécile, who, lonely and ill, allowed me to perceive her unhappiness at not seeing me, I made not a single attempt to hasten the moment of my journey to Paris, which Mme de Malbée had fixed for the middle of November. In the interval M. de Saint-Elme returned. Cécile told him nearly all that had passed between us. He again consented to the divorce, but under conditions, that it should not be sought before the end of a year and that during this time Cécile should not see me at all. She had great difficulty in resolving to subscribe to this latter condition. I urged her to resign herself to it, because (I confess) I regarded it merely as a caprice on the part of M. de Saint-Elme, and therefore did not think it too binding. I was doubtless wrong, for a promise is always a promise ; but I foresaw so many miseries for Cécile if M. de Saint-Elme withdrew his consent that I would have preferred to submit to this separation in all its rigour than to brave this possibility.

Alas ! who could have told poor Cécile, when she thought a year an unendurable period of waiting, that

nearly three would go by before we were peacefully reunited! <sup>20</sup> She made arrangements with M. de Saint-Elme whereby she ceded him a portion of her fortune, and it was agreed that she should return to Germany in the spring. Mme de Malbée obtained permission to approach to within eight leagues of Paris. In the negotiations for this I served her with the same zeal as if we had not been burning up our life in uninterrupted altercations; for she was growing continually more irritated, not at my projects, concerning which I had left much vagueness, but at my continuing to write to Cécile and often going to Paris to try to see her. I feared that Mme de Malbée, with her typical violence, might divulge this liaison, might provoke the vanity of M. de Saint-Elme—an easy thing to do—might call public attention to us, and might, in short, be the ruin of Cécile. My embarrassment plunged me even deeper into deception; and I succeeded, at the expense of my loyalty, in putting so much uncertainty into Mme de Malbée's mind that she knew not what to think. The winter passed in appalling scenes, after which she and I were dropping with exhaustion, but which remained between ourselves and ended without public scandal.

Cécile at first refused to forsake the promise she had made to M. de Saint-Elme; and since it was nevertheless necessary that we should sometimes see each other, she regularly asked his permission. At each request there was a storm, since M. de Saint-Elme, who was much more

taken up with society, dancing and all the frivolities of Paris than with Cécile, granted her as a favour a thing to which he attached no great importance.

After some time Cécile became weary of enduring his ill-temper. He had once replied to her that it would be much better if she did what she wanted instead of continually giving him a disagreeable sensation. She took him at his word, and we saw each other every day—at least, whilst I was at Paris, for Mme de Malbée often detained me in the country. Her ascendancy over me had not diminished, although she exercised it only to cause me pain, without giving herself any pleasure.

Faithful to the resolve she had taken of doing my will in everything, Cécile was, so to speak, at my orders. When I was absent, she made no complaint and sought to keep herself entertained. As soon as I returned, she renounced society and thenceforward lived only for me, sometimes waiting whole days for the moment when we could see each other.

On my side, I thought only of her. All my actions were arranged in such a way as to bring us together, and as soon as the opportunity presented itself I would break every other engagement and surmount every obstacle. The theatre, the promenade, the ball at the Opéra, were our daily rendezvous. One night, amongst others, we remained at the ball, both wearing masks, until eight o'clock in the morning; and that night bequeathed me a memory of happiness which is as keen today as if a

long time had not elapsed since that period. The feeling of being alone in a huge crowd, unknown to all, sheltered from curious eyes, surrounded by people from whom it was to our advantage to hide ourselves, and separated from them by a barrier so feeble and yet invincible : this manner of existing solely one for the other, in the midst of the waves of the multitude, seemed to us a yet closer union, and filled our hearts with pleasure and love.

I wrote that evening, in a journal I was keeping at the time, that such hours could console one for a whole lifetime of misfortunes.<sup>21</sup> We were both so much charmed with our experience that we wished to enjoy it a second time. Next week we returned to the same ball. But our expectation was disappointed, probably because it had been too keen. The sort of uneasiness that had added to the charm of our mysterious meeting had worn thin. The crowd became bothersome to us because we feared it more ; and this experience taught us that one must not transform unexpected pleasures into premeditated arrangements.

The winter passed. I had succeeded in giving Mme de Malbée sufficient guidance in her negotiations to diminish the rigour of her exile, and I was flattering myself that I would have it entirely revoked, when her imprudence, and the little case she made of my advice, drew down new persecutions upon her. She was exiled to a distance of forty leagues from Paris. I neglected no effort to parry

this stroke, which pained me extremely. I had set all my hopes upon rendering her a signal service, so that she might afterwards permit me to seek my happiness in other attachments. I do now believe that even success and the gratitude she might have owed me would not have disarmed her. But at least my heart would have been more tranquil, and her injustice would have consoled me by its own excess.

All my efforts were useless. It was necessary to obey. During the fortnight, or thereabouts, for which my fruitless negotiations lasted, Mme de Malbée behaved like a child, without gratitude and without strength of soul. She felt in no way thankful for my zeal, which had survived my feeling for her. She exposed herself without reflecting that she would compromise her friends as much as herself. Yet she had so much grace in her grief, and in the gaiety which, by reason of the fickleness of her nature, sometimes became mingled with this grief, that impatient though I was with her, and despite my love of Cécile, it was impossible for me not to share all her moods or to refrain from becoming momentarily reattached to a woman who for thirteen years had completely controlled my life. She at last departed, after having made me promise to go and rejoin her within a few weeks.

The liberty her absence gave me was devoted to Cécile: we saw each other almost every day. M. de Saint-Elme no longer made any opposition. His honour-propre was

sometimes wounded by the notion that a woman could prefer another man to himself; but his frivolity, which continually re-immersed him in all the pleasures of society, soon dispersed these little revolts of his pride, and his religious prejudices, which, as a French emigré, he combined with his frivolity, sometimes inclined him himself to desire the rupture of a marriage that his religion condemned.

Nothing, therefore, was changed in our plans. On the eve of the day when, by an effort to which I had resigned myself, and for which I had obtained Cécile's consent, I was to set off to visit Mme de Malbée, an excess of work and reading caused by my wish to finish a task I had undertaken a long time before, resulted in a sudden mishap to my eyes, which caused me the keenest alarm. I postponed my departure, I consulted oculists, whose answers increased my uneasiness. I placed myself in their hands with a great deal of docility and little confidence.

Mme de Malbée, informed of my accident by letters which I dictated, for I was not in a state to write, saw in this news only an excuse for my breaking my word to her. A sort of valet de chambre whom she employed as a general factotum<sup>22</sup> was continually nagging at me to induce me to be off. I put up with his importunities from the habit I had of enduring anything that came from Mme de Malbée. She, for her part, giving way to all the impetuosity of her nature, wrote to me in a style in which sentiment and wounded pride borrowed the language of



fury, scorn and hatred. Although weary, after so many years, of a relationship in which it was always violence that pleaded, with dagger in hand, the cause of love, the fear of driving her to some disastrous extremity overthrew my reasoned arguments and disturbed my heart. I remember that one day I had undergone a fairly painful operation. I was stretched on my bed almost in a faint, as much from the shock I had experienced as from loss of blood. It was in this situation that I received from Mme de Malbée a letter in which she overwhelmed me with accusations of all the outrages that have ever been loaded upon the shoulders of a criminal.

I found calm only with Cécile, who was always gentle and tender and who listened to me, sympathised with me, understood me—even when my feelings were such as might cause her pain—and consoled with me an admirable patience and a delicate sensibility to the griefs which came to me from another, and which she might have regarded as a wrong against herself. My eyes regained their health, and, although in revolt against Mme de Malbée's exigence and wounded by her pretensions to bend me to her will, I still regarded myself—at the risk of depriving myself of the succour that I had believed necessary to me—as bound by my promise, and I parted from Cécile, who was herself due to visit Germany a short while later.

But scarcely was I on the road when my love for the one and my impatience with the other prevailed over all other considerations. I suddenly retraced my steps, after having

gone a few leagues. I was no sooner at Paris than the spectre of Mme de Malbée's grief laid siege to me anew. I know not what would have become of me, had not chance favoured me. One of my friends, who was also a friend of Mme de Malbée, had received from her a letter full of accusations against me. He felt it his duty to communicate it to me, and in the explanations that ensued upon this confidence I learned that Mme de Malbée had used, in her dealings with a young man<sup>23</sup> for whom I knew that she had some liking, the same methods of reproach and menace as gave her such a fatal ascendancy over myself. This discovery caused these methods to lose much of their force. Seeing them thus duplicated, they seemed to me in some sort profaned, and I regained a little calm as soon as I no longer considered myself the only cause of Mme de Malbée's unhappiness.

It will perhaps be thought that such a discovery should have detached me from her entirely ; but this notion will be mistaken. I knew her as I knew myself. I knew that her conduct was characterised by inconsequence and egoism, but not by bad faith ; and that, as a consequence of her strange, passionate nature, when she did things which seemed to deny her affection for me, and which proved that this affection was not exclusive, she nevertheless experienced extreme suffering at the idea that I might escape her.

To spare Cécile the pain of a second farewell, I induced her to hasten her departure, by proposing to accompany

her for a few days. We went together as far as Châlons. Cécile hoped that the German courts would make no difficulty about decreeing her divorce. For my part, I flattered myself that I now had more strength in the presence of Mme de Malbée, and that I could at last declare to her my unshakable intention to make a rupture. I parted from Cécile, more in love with her than ever.

After so many jolts, I wished to have a few moments' rest, and before returning to Mme de Malbée's residence I stopped with my father.<sup>24</sup> I had been there for about a fortnight, postponing from one moment to the next the journey that was to put me again beneath the yoke, and much urged by my father to escape from beneath it for ever, yet always unable to envisage this course of action, which would break off so long-lasting a liaison, without a sort of shudder, when there suddenly appeared in my room a friend<sup>25</sup> of Mme de Malbée, the tutor of her children, who was charged with inducing me to follow him to her side. We had several conversations on this subject, which were fairly bitter, especially on my part; but the tutor contributed to them a great deal of patience, gentleness and adroitness. He recalled to me various mental pictures from which I had endeavoured to avert my eyes. He reawoke in me various buried memories. He flattered me with the notion of leading Mme de Malbée to what I desired, by gentleness and by giving her a final proof of friendship. He offered me his help in achieving this.

Finally he assured me that, for her part, she was resolved to leave for Vienna before the winter. This was the time that Cécile had herself fixed for her return. My heart felt a compelling urge to yield. I reflected that in Cécile's absence my being with Mme de Malbée could do no harm to anybody.

Twenty-four hours later I arrived at her house. She was waiting for me in the courtyard. Scarcely had I dismounted from the carriage and was stammering a few words, when she seized me by the arms and dragged me into the park. All the echoes resounded with cries, invectives against Cécile and reproaches against myself. After having let myself be carried away by a violence almost as disorderly as hers, I felt, as always, an insurmountable fatigue. My sole purpose was now to allow Mme de Malbée to calm down, and with this aim I shut myself up in a silence on which she put the interpretation she chose. Because I was weary, she believed she had shaken my purpose ; and for the days that followed we returned to our customary life. The perfect harmony of our spirits was such that when we were together we always had either to quarrel or to agree ; and when we had exhausted our physical energies in disputing, the most appalling storms would suddenly be followed by intimate understanding. Mme de Malbée, who had no other aim but to preserve our relations as they were, was also contented and appeased. For myself, who no longer desired these relations, I silently revolved in my head a thousand

methods of escaping from them. But outward appearances, having become once more peaceful, remained so for a considerable time.

After staying for several weeks at Mme de Malbée's side—a stay during which I continually wrote to Cécile that I was about to recapture my freedom in order to devote it to her—I went to see my family.<sup>26</sup> Nobody suspected my plans, but all my relatives were overwhelmed with grief at my seeming dependence upon Mme de Malbée. Those who believed they had some rights over me sought to enforce them in order to compel me to break with her. Those upon whom I could found some hope of fortune endeavoured to influence me by this interest. Finally, those who had only titles of friendship exhausted themselves in representations and prayers. What they were all urging me to do was the thing I desired most; and by a strange fatality I resisted them all, at the expense of my secret wishes and my happiness.

I was scarcely in their midst when I found myself assailed from all quarters. Some, thinking me bound to Mme de Malbée by solemn promises, exhorted me to marry her, and in so doing gave me to learn that during my absence Mme de Malbée had founded her accusations against me—her very public accusations—on my promise given at Leipzig. This promise, which was more than three years old, had completely slipped my memory. Since that time Mme de Malbée had behaved in such a way as to prove to me that, even whilst wishing to dispose of my

whole life, she had no idea that we ought to unite ourselves ; and in the majority of her letters during my last sojourn at Paris, she had recognised my liberty, although claiming that sensibility, consideration and delicacy should compel me to this sacrifice. It was therefore with astonishment, and even with uneasiness, that I heard her recalling a promise that I regarded as cancelled ; and I wished to have clarity on this point, which was important both to Cécile and to myself.

As soon as I was back with Mme de Malbée, I questioned her on the subject. She seemed, indeed, to believe that I could contract no engagement except with her ; but this promise must be reciprocal. In the irritation into which I was plunged by the thought that my liberty was disputed, I did not hesitate to declare to her that, since she regarded the promise binding us as legal, I claimed that it should be put into effect without delay. She was not prepared for this sudden resolution, nor accustomed to see me adopt a decided attitude. Her wrath was as great as her surprise. She rang the bell, and her children came in. " Behold the man," she said, pointing to me, " who wishes to ruin your mother by forcing her to marry him." " Look upon me," I exclaimed, taking her eldest son by the hand, " as the basest of men, if ever I marry your mother."

I departed next day at dawn, leaving a letter for Mme de Malbée that said my eternal farewells. Who would have supposed that a liaison exposed to such a shock could continue? I rode eight leagues in two hours on the same horse :

the speed of the ride saved me from the inner tumult which I knew rather than felt to be within my soul. I feared above all to be alone, and on my arrival I went in search of consolation, or rather of noise and words that would stupefy me, to a relative<sup>27</sup> who more than once had declared herself against Mme de Malbée. She learnt with joy of the course I had taken, and regarded this step as decisive. "Do not deceive yourself," I said to her. "If Mme de Malbée does not follow me, I shall resist her letters, but if she comes here, all resistance will be impossible." I had my eyes fixed on a clock, I was counting the minutes as they elapsed and striving to stifle the emotions that were crowding upon my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of Mme de Malbée. She rushed into the room and fell senseless at my feet. On returning to herself, she asked me to grant her two months more, promising that at the end of this time she would give me back my liberty if I demanded it. I set out back with her upon the road to her dwelling, and found myself again in the places I had left a dozen hours before, leaving all my family astounded and disconcerted.

I must here give an account of something that began, about this time and on this occasion, to have a great influence over my conduct. This detail is necessary to explain several of my actions, which have seemed, and might well seem, inexplicable.

There is at Lausanne a religious sect<sup>28</sup>, composed of a fairly great number of persons of varying conditions,

known as Pietists and much calumniated, who profess the opinion of Fénelon and Mme Guyon. Several of my relatives belonged to this sect and had tried on various occasions to persuade me to join it. I had been very irreligious in my youth, more in imitation of philosophic principles than by personal inclination. But for some time I had had at the bottom of my heart a need to believe ; either because this need is natural to all men, or because my situation, which was all the more painful in that I could blame only myself for whatever was disagreeable and bizarre about it, gradually disposed me to seek in religion for resources against my inner agitation.

During a previous journey to Lausanne, therefore, I had welcomed rather than rejected the advances of this sect. I had had several conversations with one of its most prominent members.<sup>29</sup> Without admitting him into the confidence of my secret thoughts, I had not hidden from him that I was very unhappy, and had offered myself to him, not as a believer, but as one who was disposed to allow him to practise upon my mind and soul whatever experiments he chose to make.

This man, whose intelligence I cannot doubt and whose sincerity I even today consider beyond suspicion, had spoken to me precisely in the language that fitted my vacillating opinions and difficult circumstances. He had kept his discourse free of anything concerned with dogmas that would have called for dangerous examination. The word " God " had not been pronounced.



“ You cannot deny,” he had said to me, “ that there is outside you a power stronger than yourself. Well, now, I tell you that the only means of happiness upon this earth is to put oneself in harmony with this power, whatever it may be, and that to put oneself in harmony with this power, one needs only two things : to pray, and to renounce one’s own will. How is one to pray, you will object, when one has no belief? I cannot answer you : try it and you will see, seek and you shall find. But it is not by asking for particular favours that you will have your prayer heard ; it is by asking that you may wish for that which is. The change will not take place in outward circumstances, but in the disposition of your soul. And what difference does it make to you? Is it not all one whether that should happen which you desire, or whether you should desire that which happens. What you need is that your will and outward events should be in harmony.”

These reflections made an impression upon me. The reading of several works of Mme Guyon produced in me a sort of unaccustomed calm which did me good. I attempted prayer, in so far as this is possible without previous conviction. I abstained from all enquiry into the nature of the unknown power I felt above me. I addressed myself only to its goodness. I asked it only to give me the strength to resign myself to its decrees. I experienced a manifest relief. What had seemed to me hard to endure whilst I was arrogating to myself the right to struggle

and complain, lost the greater part of its bitterness as soon as I made it a duty to submit to it. This first alleviation of my long sufferings gave me encouragement. I went ever further in the same direction. I told myself that, since I was already rewarded for the abnegation of my own will, therefore this abnegation was the best means of pleasing the power that presided over our destinies ; and I compelled myself to carry this abnegation to the furthest point. I soon succeeded in refraining from making plans, in regarding the future as outside the domain of calculation, and calculation itself as a trespass upon the ways of God ; and I made it a rule to live from one day to the next, without concerning myself either with what had happened, as being beyond remedy, or with what was about to happen, as being something that should be left without reserve at the disposal of Him who disposes over everything.

It was then that for the first time I breathed without pain. I felt as if freed from the burden of life. What had for many years been my torment was the continual effort I had made to steer my own actions. How many hours I had spent in repeating to myself that in such or such a circumstance it was necessary to take a decision ; listing to myself all those courses of action between which I must choose ; torn between uncertainties ; sometimes fearing that my reason was not sufficiently enlightened to perceive the various drawbacks ; and sometimes having the sad foreknowledge that my

strength would not be enough to follow the advice of my reason ! I now found myself delivered from all these pains and from the fever that had devoured me. I regarded myself as a child led by an invisible guide. I isolated each event, each hour, each minute, convinced that a higher and inscrutable will, which we could neither combat nor divine, was arranging everything for the best. My prayers always ended with the words : " I make complete abnegation of every faculty, of all knowledge, of all reasoned argument, of all judgment." And sometimes, in the middle of these prayers, I was seized upon by a deep feeling of trust, by an intimate conviction that I was protected and had no need to concern myself with my fate ; so that I became careless of all the embarrassments that surrounded me, counting on a miracle to extract me from them and lost in a meditation full of sweetness.

This resolution soon extended, as was natural, from my soul to my mind. The majority of the dogmas I had rejected, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, now seemed to me not demonstrated by logic, but proved by a sort of inner experience. I did not apply to these dogmas the instrument of reason, which is always inexact, but experienced them as true and incontestable. I did not examine whether they imposed obligations to formal worship—I discharged no such obligations.

" If God wishes such acts of adoration," I said to myself, " He will let me know ; for I wish only what He

wishes ; and if He does not cause me to wish a thing, it is because He does not wish it." Thus I slept in a sort of moral slumber, beneath the wing of an infinite being who watched over me. The effort I made to free myself suddenly from the yoke of Mme de Malbée was the last of my actions that was not in accordance with this system ; and since its result had been the opposite of what I had wanted, I gave up, in fact as well as in intention, every kind of attempt to direct my destiny.

My obligations to Cécile I referred to God. I prayed Him to inspire me with what conformed with His will, and promised myself never again to take a step that was not prompted by the inspiration of the moment. Some days before my fruitless visit to Lausanne, I had written to Cécile as if I foresaw an immediate breach with Mme de Malbée, and had asked her to give me a rendezvous in some city.

When I had returned to her rival, I wrote to her an account of part of what had happened, telling myself that what I did not write to her was that which God did not wish should be written. I told her that I had consented to remain with Mme de Malbée for two more months, and ended with a definite offer and a solemn undertaking to join her, wherever she might be, after the expiry of this term. I had no proof that I was capable of doing this. I had resigned every exercise of my own will, with the result that the will of Mme de Malbée was just as capable of being my law two months later as it was immediately.

But I reassured myself by reflecting that if God wished me to see Cécile again, He would take measures to provide me with the means of doing so.

From this day onwards I no longer struggled against any of Mme de Malbée's demands. I stayed at her house without paying a single visit to my family and without entering into any explanation concerning my plans. Sometimes Mme de Malbée, surprised at my sudden meekness, began speaking of our future, in order to see how I would answer. On such occasions I would shut myself up in silence, in which I sought to evade a conversation that I found both painful and impossible to sustain—painful because it made me feel still more bitterly the obstacles separating me from Cécile, and impossible to sustain because, having in all good faith shaken off my destiny and all responsibility for my life, I had nothing to say concerning a future over which I no longer claimed to have any control.

I in no way hid from Mme de Malbée the influence my new religious ideas had upon me; and although nothing was more antipathetic to her nature than the passive and blind resignation I had adopted, nevertheless, in her frequent weariness with herself and the activity that was wearing her away, she was tempted to imitate me in order to find some repose. But soon her nature regained the upper hand. Her will reasserted itself, impatient and rebellious. Her reason revolted against her own renunciation; and all we gained from each of

these theological disputes was that time elapsed, and that in our preoccupation with general ideas we interrupted the quarrels which our mutual relationship would otherwise have engendered, and ceased to devour one another.

Cecile, who, replying upon my previous letters, had been waiting with entire confidence, in the bosom of her family, for me to write to her that I had gained my freedom, was much astonished when I announced to her that I was prolonging my stay with Mme de Malbée by two months. "I shall never break off my destiny from yours without your consent," she wrote to me, "but I urge you to take council with yourself and finally to make your own acquaintance. If you are not strong enough, or if you believe yourself to be under any obligations, or if you feel any regrets, tell me so frankly. Do not cause me to leave the last refuge I have left. Do not drag me to France, under the eyes of M. de Saint-Elme, to a country where I have no protector, if you cannot be that to me. I shall live alone, and shall not cease to love you. I shall be yours when you tell me that it is agreeable and easy for you to be mine; but spare me the uncertainty, the scandal, the anguish and the shame." 80

I saw in this letter of Cécile's that I was running the risk of losing her. My passion for her grew with this fear, without giving me the strength to try any other means of keeping her than to beg her, in reply, to come

as near to me as possible, swearing that I would not abandon her. I took my desire to see her again to be an inspiration from Heaven; and when, alarmed by the difficulties put in the way of our reunion by Mme de Malbée's ascendancy and my own weakness, I left it to Heaven to remove these difficulties by means of some miracle. Cécile promised to do my bidding, and mentioned the time of her arrival in France at some village on the frontier.

This time was about six weeks distant from the moment at which she wrote to me. I calmed down. A work I had undertaken<sup>31</sup> provided me with a fairly effective distraction. Mme de Malbée, the most agreeable person to live with in small matters when she had triumphed in great ones, took a keen interest in my work. The sympathy of our minds obliterated the hostility of our feelings, and our life again became, to all appearances, peaceful and even agreeable.

About the middle of autumn Mme de Malbée, who, even with me, became bored in the country and would have become much more bored during the winter, formed the design of going to Vienna. This resolve, which facilitated my reunion with Cécile, fortified me in the opinion that Heaven came to the help of whoever knew how to resign himself. I redoubled my submissiveness and was more than ever encouraged in the convenient lack of foresight which I had made a religious duty. Was I wrong? Other people will think so. But even today I

know not whether, in the midst of the night that surrounds us and what with the insufficiency of our questionable and haughty reason, this complete surrender to Providence is not man's most sure resource.

However that may be, the days sped by in succession into the irrevocable past. I was now within no more than a month of Mme de Malbée's departure, and was rejoicing in the delays that had befallen Cécile's journey, when suddenly I received from her a letter written from Besançon, where she was awaiting me. At first my emotion was extreme, as also was my embarrassment. I was full of gratitude for the submission with which, despite so many outward appearances that could not but discourage her and give her umbrage, she was returning to put herself under the empire of a man who was still dependent upon a rival.

To leave her for a month alone at an inn, and in a completely strange city, seemed to me impossible. To depart was no less so. Under what pretext was I to do this, and, above all, where was I to get the strength? I wrote to Cécile that I was about to rejoin her at any moment. I asked her to give me from a week to ten days for family affairs. I arranged to make it seem that my letters and her replies had been retarded. Indeed, the difficulties of communication caused by the bad weather made my delays seem less strange in Cécile's eyes. Her very isolation and uncertainties made it necessary for her to wait for me. This interval of four weeks, which,



if announced in advance, would have seemed to her insupportable, passed by imperceptibly when subdivided into small portions at the end of each of which was hope.

The moment fixed by Mme de Malbée for her journey having arrived, I accompanied her as far as to Lausanne.<sup>32</sup> There we spent four days in saying our farewells. As I left this woman who sometimes seemed a burden upon my existence, I felt what I had experienced several times before: the approach of my freedom lessened the bitterness of my slavery. Various inconveniences of our life together lost their force now that they were nearing an end, and I regretted the loss of the charms that I was about to cease to enjoy. By a strange complication of a diversity of feelings, Mme de Malbée's departure grieved me precisely because I was glad to see the last of her. If she had suddenly decided to remain, I would have regained all my impatience with her. But, being certain that I would soon be my own master again, I gave myself up with safety to impulses of tenderness which were all the more genuine inasmuch as they were without consequence.

Whoever had observed me at the moments immediately preceding our separations would have been persuaded, and Mme de Malbée must have believed, that I loved her more than ever. In many respects this was true, and in such a way that, if I deceived her, it was by yielding to my real feelings. My falsity did not consist in feigning a

sensibility greater than I possessed, but in giving the impression that this sensibility would have consequences that it was not to have. Mme de Malbée left me, therefore, on the 4th of December 1807, believing herself to be still the arbiter of my destiny ; and I myself set out two days later on the road to Besançon.

## SEVENTH PERIOD



*6th December 1807—2nd February*  
*1808*



I STILL REMEMBER TODAY THE DEEP SORROW THAT overwhelmed me as I travelled from Lausanne to Besançon. The weather was dreadful, the night was dark. The snow, which fell to the earth in thick flakes, lent even the darkness a whitish tint that made it more lugubrious. The wind bellowed around my carriage and threatened to overturn it. The horses advanced only with difficulty, often straying from the road and sometimes suddenly plunging into what appeared to be abysses. The postilion kept stopping at every moment to tell me that the nearer we approached the mountains, the more numerous would be the obstacles and the more dangerous the road.

But all this outward confusion, all this hostility of exterior nature, were nothing in comparison with the grief and the struggles that I felt at the bottom of my soul. Cécile was awaiting me. Mme de Malbée had departed. Her absence, which was to last for six months, and a distance of three hundred leagues between us, left me a complete freedom to carry out all my projects. Thus a liaison of thirteen years was about to be broken. I was about to forsake a woman to whom I had given, and from whom I had received, so many proofs of affection. She had been my life's tyrant, but she had also been

its purpose. A thousand memories had twined around my heart ; all I had done for her, the devotion I had shown to her, was about to be wasted. I was about to hurl completely away whatever good I had been able to achieve during more than a third of my existence.

Motionless in a corner of my carriage, I saw all the spectres of the past rise and increase in stature. The difficulties of the road seemed to me a warning from Heaven. I could almost have wished that they had been great enough to compel me to turn back. Yet Cécile was awaiting me—the kind, gentle, angelic Cecile who had suffered so much and had submitted herself to so many vexations, she whom I had wearied with so many vacillations, and whom, to cap it all, I had dragged to a foreign country with a promise to protect her.

During a steep descent, several leagues from Besançon, the harness broke, the carriage hurled itself upon the horses that could no longer restrain it, and the postilion could see no other resource but to urge them on at full speed to avoid being smashed to pieces. This expedient, although unique, was perilous, and even as he galloped, with the speed of lightning, the postilion cried out that we were undone and were about to plunge into the Doubs, which flowed at a distance of two hundred feet below the road, to one side of which there was a sheer drop. I believed, indeed, that we were about to perish, and the thought gave me great joy. I needed death to save me from the uncertainties of life, and eternity did not

seem to me too long a period of rest. But my conductor, who in no way shared my desires, perceived to the right of the road a fairly deep cavity, into which he succeeded in hurling us. The carriage was damaged, but the horses were halted.

We went on foot as far as Ornans, whence I wrote to Cécile, expressing to the best of my ability my joy at finding myself on the point of seeing her—a joy that she must have supposed to be unalloyed, yet that was in fact so troubled. My carriage was repaired, and I set off again. The storm had not abated, and the roads were encumbered with snow.

At a league from Besançon I suddenly saw two women approaching with difficulty through the tempest, which at every moment compelled them to make a halt. They were Cécile and her maid. The sight of them inspired me with a feeling that cannot be defined. Far from my being grateful to Cécile for her eagerness in coming to meet me, her behaviour in facing the inclemency of the season, of walking through a torrent of mud and exposing herself to the stares of the peasants, who were astonished to see a well-dressed woman in such a situation, seemed to me improper and crazy. Nevertheless I leapt to the ground; but my first action as I took Cécile's hand was to say to her: "You are out of your mind; you should at least have chosen some other method of travel." She looked at me with surprise, and then without answering my reproach, "Continue your journey," she said; "I

shall rejoin you in due course." In vain I pressed her to take her seat beside me or to permit me to walk beside her. She resisted my twofold entreaty, and I was still so dumbfounded by all my feelings that, on her refusal, I climbed back into the carriage, left her on foot and proceeded on my way to Besançon.

My servant, an old Frenchman, who was as familiar as they all are with their masters, said to me with a laugh: "Ah! Ah! Monsieur! And Mme de Malbée!" To hear the name uttered in these circumstances—the sarcastic laugh of this coarse fellow, the sort of approbation he gave to my treachery, this outrage I was bringing on the woman I had betrayed—all this enhanced my inward agony. I arrived at Besançon in this mood, and was there for an hour before Cécile's return. I spent this hour in writing to Mme de Malbée the most passionate letter she had ever received from me. Cécile arrived at last, but so crushed with fatigue and so soaked through by the rain that she was obliged to shut herself in her room for a long time before she received me. During this interval I pondered on what I had to do. The conclusion of my reflections was that I was engaged to Cécile and that, if she was free, it was my duty to marry her. The stamp of sorrow which I had observed on her face, and which I could only attribute to the strange welcome I had given her, had filled me with remorse. My letter to Mme de Malbée—that letter in which I had lavished upon her all professions of regret, love and devotion, that



letter in which I had disowned all the complaints I might have had against her—was still at the post-office when already the contrary resolve was in my heart. With this fatal changeability, it is not surprising that I have been accused of falsity.

I went to Cécile's room, and we embraced. Determined as I was to unite myself to her, I was none the less sad at the prospect ; or rather, the greater my determination, the greater my sadness. Cécile, for her part, had conceived from the first moment a very natural distrust. We questioned each other concerning what had occurred during our separation. Cécile told me that her relatives in Germany had advised her to have her marriage terminated in France, since the German courts could not but recognise whatever the laws of France might decree concerning a marriage with a Frenchman. She was therefore returning to France to devise, together with M. de Saint-Elme, the simplest and least scandal-provoking method. He had undertaken to make application himself for the divorce they had agreed upon. Her freedom was therefore certain and close at hand.

After having thus given me an account of what concerned herself, she fell silent as if waiting for what I had to say to her. The idea that she was not yet free put into my head the notion of a delay, and my imagination seized upon it. I therefore spoke to her only with this notion in mind. My entire reply was just, reasonable, the only thing possible in view of the existing situation,

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for it would take time for her marriage to be terminated, and further time until we could get married, after the annulment or divorce. I could have been the most passionate, the most impatient of men, and the state of affairs would have been unaltered. But my language reflected my secret thoughts, and Cécile easily read the depths of my soul. She questioned me concerning Mme de Malbée. She saw my uncertainty and the remorse that had again taken hold of me. She fell into the deepest melancholy ; and this meeting, which I had for five months been beseeching from Heaven, for which I had had recourse to so much dissimulation and so many ruses, was within an hour merely a source of unhappiness for us both.

For the rest of the evening we were silent, and throughout the whole night I did not close my eyes. Tossed by a storm of conflicting thought, I reviewed in my memory the long series of inconsequential acts of which I had been guilty. I reproached myself with the unhappiness of two women who, each in her fashion, loved me sincerely ; and, forced to choose between inevitable evils, I called upon Heaven to guide me. All my sufferings had had no other cause but my own will. I had wished to separate from Mme de Malbée, I had wished to unite myself to Cécile ; and I had proceeded by often crooked paths towards this end which so many circumstances made it so difficult to achieve. I believed I could feel that God was punishing me for this will that was rebellious to His orders.

The words of the man³⁴ who had been the first to inspire me with religious ideas, came back to my mind. More than once, suspecting my plans for a breach, without guessing at the new attachment that I wished to contract : " It is in vain," he had said to me, " that you seek to break the bonds that are written in Heaven. Neither distance nor the barriers you might raise between Mme de Malbée and yourself would tear you from each other. You might flee to the ends of the world, and her soul would call out to the depths of yours. You might marry another woman, and this woman would find she had married not you, but her rival. Mme de Malbée has her faults, and this liaison spells some unhappiness for you ; but every man has his cross on this earth, and Mme de Malbée is the cross that you must bear." All that I suffered, the trouble that had arisen within me at the instant when all exterior obstacles had been overcome, the magical impossibility, so to speak—for it had no outward and visible cause—the impossibility, I repeat, which I suddenly felt of taking a single step towards the goal I had set myself, seemed to me to confirm these fatal truths that had been uttered to me with authority, with the tone of a prophet.

The complete conviction that such was indeed the celestial decree, weighed upon me with an enormous weight. I no longer felt any strength to resist. I begged forgiveness of the power that was mistress over me, for having dared to flout its utterances. I commended Cécile

to its protection, and from the bottom of my heart I renounced her. By this act of resignation I succeeded in regaining a little calm ; but the circumstances were none the less grave and embarrassing. Cécile was alone, two hundred leagues from any protector, at an inn, agitated, desperate and sick. I could not leave her, and I had no reassurance concerning the consequences my desertion would have upon this already shattered soul. I asked Cécile for six months in which to see Mme de Malbée again, in order to cleanse myself of a dissimulation for which I blushed and to recover the right to make myself my own master. I advised her to go to Switzerland, to wait there for the fine weather and to return to Germany. She was so much discouraged that she raised no objection to anything. In silence, and with lowered head, she consented to all I said ; but her fixed stare, the kind of stupor into which she had fallen, the change in her features and voice, all these made me fear that her health might succumb or that her reason might be affected.

We set out together for Dôle. I intended to stop at my father's house, whilst Cécile would continue her journey to Lausanne. On the way she made some effort to speak of indifferent matters ; and I endeavoured to reply to her. Our situation was dreadful, and even as we spoke of exterior objects, we felt escaping from our eyes tears which we strove to hide from one another. Suddenly Cécile fell into a swoon so deep that all my attempts to reanimate her were useless. I was compelled to continue

my journey, holding her in my arms motionless, colourless and lifeless, and sometimes I questioned if she still lived. Thus we arrived at Dôle. I sent for a physician. Cécile returned to life after a few hours, and the danger seemed to be over.

But on the next day she had such violent cramps in the stomach that in a few minutes she appeared to be threatened by an inflammation which would have been beyond remedy. The physicians—for I had assembled all the physicians in this city—gave me very little hope. However frequent bleedings reduced the symptoms that alarmed them. Night fell. Exhausted by her sufferings and by loss of blood, Cécile swooned again.

She remained in this condition until morning. The imprint of death was on all her features, and the surgeon who was watching with me at her side pointed out to me in the contraction of her mouth, in her eyes, where only a little of the white was showing, in the stiffness of her limbs and in her already icy extremities, the heralds of an inevitable dissolution. Nevertheless she opened her eyes, but without returning to life. The insensibility was followed by delirium. She spoke to her relatives, as if they were standing round her. She believed herself surrounded by funereal objects. She looked at me without recognition. Only my voice made an impression on her, and this impression appeared to be painful. The delirium lasted for a long time, and was followed by a lethargic slumber. When she awoke, in the afternoon of the following day,

she was so weak that the physicians assured me she would succumb to the least setback. She could not utter a word or lift her head, and we had great difficulty in succeeding in making her swallow a few drops of milk.³⁵

NOTES



Italiam, Italiam. Virgil, *Aeneid*, III, line 523.

This enthusiastic epigraph is somewhat unexpected from the pen of B. Constant, for whom Italy never seems to have had much attraction. It would remain entirely enigmatic were we not able to relate it to the "Project of journey to Rome" with Charlotte which Benjamin noted in his *Journal* on the date of 7th December 1811.

² Georgine-Charlotte-Augusta von Hardenberg (1769-1845), Benjamin's second wife, was born at London, where her father, Count Johann-Ernst von Hardenberg, held the post of Privy Councillor to the Hanoverian legation. She had been married for five years, not two, to the Baron von Marenholtz, at Brunswick, where Constant made her acquaintance.

³ Wilhelm-Christian von Marenholtz, first husband of Charlotte von Hardenberg and twenty years older than she, held the post of chamberlain at the court of Brunswick.

⁴ Amalie von Hardenberg, who had married Herr von Staffhorst, an official at the court of Brunswick.

⁵ It was in March 1738 that B. Constant had entered the service of Duke Karl-Wilhelm-Ferdinand of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, as a gentleman of the bedchamber. On 8th May of the following year he had married Wilhelmine von Cramm, lady-in-waiting to the Duchess of Brunswick.

⁶ The text of her reply and also the greater part of her letters to Benjamin, have been published by the baroness Charlotte de Constant-Rebecque in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1st May 1934.

NOTES

⁷ The name of Minna von Cramm's lover is not known, but it seems doubtful whether he is here given his real name. Like all the other characters in *Cécile*, Constant has presumably disguised him under a borrowed name.

⁸ Constant can scarcely have written this sentence after 1811, for after the beginning of the following year the harmony between the couple was no longer perfect.

⁹ Pyrmont was a real watering-place, in the principality of Waldeck. But, according to Charlotte's letters, Benjamin in fact stayed at Driburg, near Kassel.

¹⁰ A word omitted in the manuscript.

¹¹ The manuscript reads, not "voir", but "avoir".

¹² The bankruptcy of the Lausanne notary Jean-Abram Blondel, which actually occurred in May 1793.

¹³ This name is a thin disguise for that of Mme de Charrière van Zuylen, author of *Caliste*, who lived at Colombier, near Neuchâtel.

¹⁴ She was still only fifty-three years old.

¹⁵ The widow of Jacob Mauvillon. The latter, of French stock on both sides, was born at Leipzig in 1748. His translations had introduced in Germany the works of Raynal and Turgot, but his name is associated especially with that of Mirabeau, whose friend he was and with whom he wrote the celebrated book *De la monarchie prussienne sous Frédéric le Grand* (London, 1788).

¹⁶ *Mme de Staël*, whom Benjamin met for the first time near Nyon (canton of Vaud) on 19th September 1794, according to the *Journal intime* and *Carnet*.

¹⁷ At a league's distance from Lausanne, at the château of Mézery, which Mme de Staël had rented and where she spent the winter of 1794-5, surrounded by a court of illustrious émigrés: Mathieu de Montmorency, Mme de Laval, Narbonne, Jaucourt, and others.

¹⁸ The vicomte Alexandre du Tertre, whom Charlotte married, as her second husband, in 1798.

¹⁹ At Maffliers, north of the forest of Montmorency and not far from les Herbages, B. Constant's small country property.

²⁰ One can tell from this phrase that *Cécile* cannot have been written before 1809.

²¹ The *Journal* that has survived contains only the brief mention: "Bal de l'Opéra. I wandered for two hours without finding Charlotte. At last I found her. I spent three delightful hours. She is the gentlest, most agreeable, most angelic person I know."

²² This factotum of Mme de Staël is well known. His name was Uginet, but at Coppet he was nearly always called Eugène.

²³ An allusion to Prosper de Barante, Mme de Staël's new passion.

²⁴ At Brevans, near Dôle (Jura), to which Colonel Juste de Constant had retired after the loss of certain law-suits and of the great estates he possessed in the canton of Vaud.

²⁵ August Schlegel, whom Mme de Staël had brought back from Germany in 1804.

²⁶ Mme de Nassau, his aunt, and his cousin Rosalie, who lived at Lausanne, had openly declared themselves against Mme de Staël.

²⁷ It is known from the *Journal* that this dramatic scene occurred on 1st September 1807 at Chaumière, near the gates of Lausanne, at the house of Mme de Charrière de Bavois. Rosalie de Constant, who played a part in it, has described it with much verve and many details in a letter to her brother Charles (B. Constant, *Lettres à sa famille*, ed. Menos, p. 40).

²⁸ This sect, also called the "Inner Souls", founded at Lausanne in the middle of the eighteenth century by the painter Jean-Philippe

Dutoit-Membrini, was at this time directed by a cousin of Benjamin, the chevalier Charles de Langallerie. Amongst its most ardent initiates was Lisette de Constant, the sister of Rosalie, who, for her part, severely condemned the Quietist doctrines.

²⁹ The chevalier de Langallerie.

³⁰ This noble and touching letter does not appear in Charlotte's correspondence as published by the baroness C. de Constant (see note 6). But is not this nobility of tone reminiscent rather of *Adolphe*?

³¹ His tragedy *Wallstein*, which he finished during his compulsory stay at Coppet from the beginning of September to the end of November 1807.

³² Benjamin Constant's *Journal* contains a gap extending from 20th November to 10th December of this year 1807. A leaf has been suppressed, it is not known by whom, but quite possibly by Benjamin himself. Cécile partly fills this gap. Without this narrative, we would know nothing of the days that Mme de Staël and Constant spent in saying farewell before the departure for Vienna, or of Benjamin's journey from Lausanne to Besançon, or of his meeting with Charlotte.

³³ If, as is probable, Constant crossed the Jura by Jougne and Pontarlier the steep descent where the accident occurred must almost certainly have been that which ends at Moutiers, above the deep ravine of the Loue, and not of the Doubs.

³⁴ His cousin Charles de Langallerie (see note 28).

³⁵ 13th December. Constant notes in his *Journal*: "She is so weak that one might declare her unable to live for an hour. The danger is less, but it has not yet passed. Her stomach can take milk . . ." It is at this same date, apparently, that he broke off the narrative of *Cécile*, whereas he continued his *Journal* until the 27th December.

NOTES

The dates indicated at the head of this final " Period " plainly show that it was the author's intention to make this section include his long stay with Charlotte at Bravans, at his father's house, and to end with their departure for Paris at the beginning of February 1808.